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Brushfire War Against Oman Now in 7th Year

Red Guerrillas Based on South Yemen Get Arms, Training From China, Soviet Union

BY WILLIAM J. COUGHLIN

Times Staff Writer

ADEN, South Yemen—If and when there is a cease-fire in Vietnam, a number of small brushfire guerrilla wars will continue to make peace on earth as elusive as ever.

Many of these smaller wars are in Africa, where rebel forces struggle against Portuguese colonialism or where old antipathies plague new nations.

But one of the oldest and hottest guerrilla wars in the region is here at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, where Communist rebels based in South Yemen are waging a sporadic seven-year-old war against Sultan Qabous of adjacent Oman. It is a war which threatens Western interests in the entire oil-rich region.

Supported by arms and training from both China and the Soviet Union, the so-called Dhofar rebels continue a guerrilla war among the desert hills that is textbook in its simplicity but frustratingly effective against Western-trained conventional forces.

Searing Heat, Monsoons

Their area of operations is treeless, parched and subject to some of the world's most searing heat when not being lashed by Indian Ocean monsoons, which make it impassable.

A spokesman for the rebel movement charged here recently in an interview with The Times that Iran this month airlifted thousands of troops into Oman to support the ruler of that kingdom in an all-out effort against the Dhofar rebels.

He said Iranian forces were joining British and Jordanian troops already in Oman in a new attempt to crush the Dhofar rebellion, which continues an on-again, off-again battle with the sultan dating back to June, 1965.

There also are said to be Saudi Arabian forces in Oman but, according to the rebel spokesman, these have not taken part in the fighting as yet.

'New Aircraft in Area'

The spokesman for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf said that Iran also might be sending American-built aircraft to provide air support for the sultan's forces and he commented:

"We see new aircraft in the area. We do not know their nationality."

Iran is equipped with Douglas McDonnell F-4 Phantoms and Northrop F-5 Freedom Fighters.

The spokesman suggested that the arrival of Iranian forces was a followup to the Shah of Iran's recent declaration of an expanded Iranian interest in Indian Ocean military affairs.

Earlier this month, Omani government forces announced a cease-fire in the eastern zone of Dhofar Province and offered amnesty to any rebels who would come down from the hills and surrender, according to reports reaching South Yemen.

Rebels Reject Offer

A Popular Front spokesman who identified himself as Youssef Tamir said the rebel forces rejected the cease-fire, which was not offered in the western

where fighting continued. He said no word had reached Aden of the situation in the eastern zone since rejection of the cease-fire.

Popular Front headquarters here is a seedy walkup flat in a crumbling tenement on one of Aden's main shopping streets. A limp flag hangs from the balcony. The walls are covered with maps of the battle area.

Spokesman Tamir is an intent, dark young man who speaks with sincerity.

"I know you are accustomed to the usual Arab military communiques," he said. "But please believe ours. We try to make them honest."

The communiques tell of sporadic fighting in Dhofar province. As in most military communiques, there are body counts, but these appear modest.

Rebel losses are acknowledged, sometimes exceeding the claims of opposition casualties, also modest.

Tamir is frank in acknowledging that the rebel operation receives aid from China, its principal supporter, as well as the Soviet Union and the South Yemen government.

"This government has helped us with all means and declared its help," he said, "although we must at all times be prepared to be independent."

South Yemen Prime Minister Ali Nasser Mohammed confirmed that support in a later interview, saying, "It is a cornerstone of the strategy of our revolution to persist in rendering the necessary support and help to the Arab revolutionary movements, especially to the revolutions in Oman and the Arabian Gulf and Palestine."

South Yemen, Tamir said, is providing arms, technical support and advice to the Dhofar rebels but "we must do our own fighting."

state of the uprising as a daily war over a sprawling and indeterminate 125-to-250-mile front. He said Popular Front had established civil rule as well as military rule in the regions of Oman adjacent to the South Yemen border. Tamir said the fighting could be described as classic guerrilla warfare, "not fighting for every centimeter of land."

One of the objectives of the rebels is to keep the people of the region educated and informed, he said.

"We know we must create our sea to swim in since we are prepared to fight for years," he said. "We know we are only in the beginning."

Tamir gave details of recent fighting—a battle in Arzat, where there is a pond in the mountains near the coast and where

two rebels died. He also told of the destruction of three British armored cars a little over 60 miles from the Yemen border.

He denounced the Sultan of Oman as a reactionary ruler who hopes to crush any independence among his people.

"We are trying to change that way of life," he said. "Our classic slogan is water and grass for all the people."

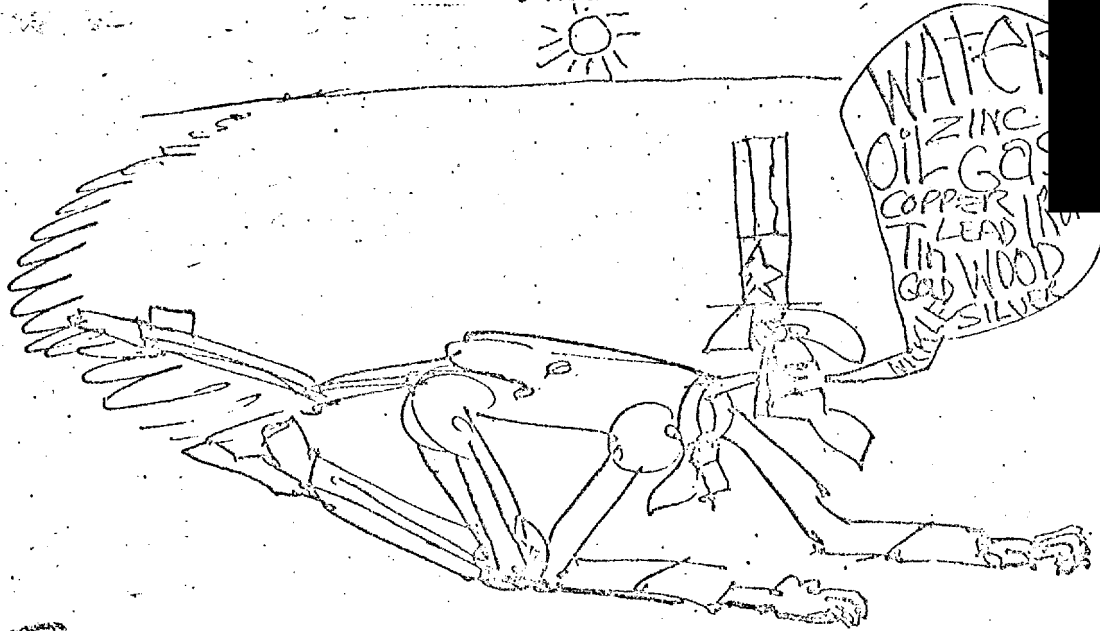
The aim of the rebels is to unite all the Arab sheikdoms from Dhofar to Kuwait into one progressive gulf state, he said.

Popular Front, denying reports from the other side that opposition was being overcome, said that as recently as July the rebels seized the important town of Murbat about 100 miles into Oman from the Yemen border for a period of 18 hours, smashing the military center and the sultan's palace there.

One of the interesting questions in the struggle for Dhofar is just what forces the rebels are opposing. The British presumably pulled all of their troops out of the Arabian

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U.S. steps up penetration of oil-rich Persian Gulf

By Fred Halliday
Special to the Guardian

U.S. military and diplomatic penetration of the oil-rich Persian Gulf has escalated in the last nine months.

Chief reasons for this move by the Nixon regime are the growth of Soviet influence in the Mideast and Indian Ocean areas and the threat of popular revolt in the Persian Gulf zone itself following Britain's partial pullout at the end of 1971.

The Soviets have advanced their positions in the Arab world since the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. Last year Egypt signed a new 15-year defense pact with the USSR. This spring Soviet Premier Kosygin flew to Iraq, at the top of the Gulf, to sign defense and economic agreements linking that country to the USSR. Further east, the Soviet-Indian victory over Pakistan last December has also highlighted an apparent threat to U.S. strategic interests in the Gulf and Indian Ocean.

When Secretary of State William Rogers visited Saudi Arabia last year it was this Soviet threat, not the Arab-Israeli dispute, that dominated his talks with Saudi leaders. And the U.S. has already announced that it will deploy ships of the Seventh Fleet in the Gulf and Indian Ocean areas, once they are no longer needed in Indochina.

The other major factor behind this U.S. move is that Britain removed most of its armed forces from the Gulf last year. The U.S. had tried to persuade the British not to put this measure through, but had not succeeded. While the British were there they controlled the zone politically—but the U.S. has the greatest economic power, with ownership of two-thirds of the oil and a \$5 billion investment. With 70 percent of the capitalist world's known reserves, the Gulf is a key to U.S. economic plunder of the third world. Gulf oil is 30 times cheaper to produce than Texas or Alaskan oil and this wealth of oil makes the area prone to careful Pentagon attention. With depletion of reserves in the U.S. and delays on the Alaska pipeline, the U.S. may have to import more than the 10 million barrels a day at the moment; and the big source for these imports will be the Gulf. There have recently been reports that the U.S.-owned ARAMCO,

which monopolizes Saudi Arabian production, has planned to treble its production over the next decade, from 4 million barrels a day to 12 million.

U.S. deal in Bahrain

First public sign of the U.S. buildup in the Gulf came in January with the revelation that the U.S. had reached a secret deal on naval facilities in the Gulf state of Bahrain. The base there was built by the British and the U.S. had used it since 1947. Last year, as the British began to leave, the U.S. moved in. Bahraini defense chief Sheikh Hamid bin Isa was sent to staff college at Fort Leavenworth for a year's training. In December 1971, U.S. Deputy Assistant of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Roger P. Davies, visited Bahrain and confirmed the new base deal.

According to the State Department, the U.S. activity in the Gulf is only "a flag-showing operation to manifest U.S. interest in the area." But although the U.S. presence is small (260 men permanently on shore, a flagship, two destroyers), it provides a foothold for future deployments, and for a permanent watch on all Soviet actions in the Gulf and Red Sea. It is also clearly a basis for U.S. intervention in Bahrain if the ruling pro-imperialist al-Khalifa family run into trouble. Bahrain (Pop. 220,000) has a small oil output; but its refinery handles large quantities of oil pumped from nearby Saudi Arabia. The Bahrain Petroleum Company (50 percent Texaco, 50 percent Standard Oil of California) has also built a flourishing industrial complex around the refinery. Any political crisis in Bahrain would affect the "stability" of the rest of the Gulf.

In 1956 and in 1965 British-officered troops crushed popular uprisings. Hundreds were arrested and the popular leaders deported. All trade unions and political organizations remain banned. Even the Bahrain Students Union has to operate from abroad. Strikes began again in 1970 and a third big upsurge came this March when a strike at the airport spread to town and all shops, in the streets, when the government used armored cars and reportedly brought in Bedouin tribesmen from Saudi Arabia, the

U.S. 'arrangement' in Oman hinted

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By OSWALD JOHNSTON
Sun Staff Correspondent

Muscat, Oman—Robert B. Anderson, a former United States Treasury Secretary and sometime special envoy to the Middle East, is involved in a series of commercial transactions with the Sultan of Oman which may have wide implications concerning American diplomatic and military policy in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean.

There is no objective evidence here that Mr. Anderson is acting in any official capacity. But the opinion is widespread among informed sources here, both in and out of the Omani government, that the business deals in question are profoundly political.

To guard coastline

It is the frank view of one high official in the largely British-staffed Omani Defense Ministry that at least one of the deals associated with Mr. Anderson is nothing less than an "American arrangement" to help guard this strategic nation's 1,000-mile-long coastline, from the mouth of the Persian Gulf down the northwestern shore of the Arabian Sea.

This assumption, if true, seems to point toward a stepped-up U.S. naval competition with the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean south of the Arabian Sea, and possibly the Persian Gulf itself.

The Sultan's government, heavily supported by the British, is trying to suppress a Communist-supported guerrilla rebellion in Oman's southernmost province, and the Russians are believed in military circles here to be using south Yemen, the rebels' main sanctuary and supply source, as a base for electronic spy ships disguised as fishing trawlers.

Oil exploration rights

The commercial implications of the transactions themselves, are sweeping. They involve exploration rights for offshore oil on more than half the Omani coastline, for oil exploration on roughly one-quarter of the country's 120,000-square-mile land surface and mineral exploration rights on all of its land surface.

They also involve a scheme to develop a fishing industry in

the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea under a contract which would place most of the initial expense on the Omanis. Fishing is regarded by planning experts here as the country's best chance for long-range development if its oil resources prove limited.

The fisheries scheme most generally is pointed to as evidence that Mr. Anderson and the Sultan closed a political as well as a commercial deal.

Patrol boat plans

A senior Defense Ministry official in a recent interview made no attempt to conceal his opinion that the contract to bring American industry into Oman's rich offshore fishing grounds amounts to an "American arrangement" to help the Sultan's British-officered armed forces set a "watch and ward on the coast."

With some 40 per cent of Oman's revenue already going to the military, plans now are afoot to buy patrol boats and develop a naval port near Muscat. The fishing contract is seen to dovetail neatly with this project.

"The Sultan agreed to bring in American expertise to set up a fishing industry," the defense official explained. "But once it is set up, we will want to keep poachers out."

Questioned further, the official explained that the "poachers" he had in mind were the Russian trawlers with their suspected electronic gear.

Visited Sultan on yacht

The deals are understood to have been worked out in principle as long ago as last October, when Mr. Anderson visited the country and was entertained for lunch by Sultan Qabus Bin Said on his royal yacht.

But the details of some of the transactions did not become known for many months. The fishing exploitation deal, which involves a consortium headed by Charles S. Black, of San Francisco, husband of the former child movie star and occasional Republican politician, Shirley Temple, was not settled until early this year.

Some of the arrangements never became known. Sultan Qabus is, by Western standards, an absolute monarch and he is known to have overridden

objections from his top economic adviser, a former International Monetary Fund financial expert, against several points in the fishing contract. His motives are understood to have been political.

"Diplomatic help"

In general, the economists and planning experts responsible for Oman's effort to move out of a near-medieval backwardness, feel that the Sultan agreed to pay Mr. Black's consortium far too much for the privilege of having an important natural resource exploited.

"Apparently the Sultan felt it was worth it to get the advantage of Anderson's diplomatic help—whatever that may turn out to be" one of them observed.

As an example, informed observers here point to the probability that Mr. Anderson used his contacts and good offices in Saudi Arabia to arrange a summit meeting between Sultan Qabus and King Feisal late last year. The Saudis and the Omanis are old enemies, and as recently as last September the Saudis tried to bloc Omani membership in both the United Nations and the Arab League.

Sole mineral agent

Again, military officials see important gains in the detente with the Saudis. Only 15 years ago, tribal rebels supported by the Saudis and supplied with American weapons staged an uprising in northern Oman which the British helped quell. Now it is hoped that the Saudis will throw their weight on the Omani side against the rebels in the south.

Under the oil and mineral exploration deals, Mr. Anderson has been commissioned as sole agent to lease exploration rights to any interested developer. Early this year a veteran American oil man and Anderson acquaintance, C. Stribling Snodgrass, of Washington, was named special "petroleum adviser" to the Sultan.

A member of the Sultan's staff of advisers denied recently that Mr. Snodgrass is acting for the Anderson oil exploration concession in his capacity as an Omani government official. But a man here takes it for granted there must be some connection.

No written contract

There is no written contract connecting Mr. Anderson with Mardela International Ltd., the fishing exploitation consortium headed by Mr. Black. Again, it is taken for granted he was prime mover of the deal.

As one well-placed source here put it recently, "Mardela is Robert Anderson."

Under the terms of the fishing contract, the Sultan's government will supply two exploration vessels and pay Mardela \$2 million to run a 30-month feasibility study on developing a fishing industry in the tuna-rich fishing grounds off the Omani coast.

Backed by Del Monte

Mardela is backed by Del Monte corporation the giant American food packer, and FMC Machinery International, subsidiary of FMC corporation, a billion-dollar machinery, chemical and ordnance manufacturer.

With such well-heeled backers in the picture, economists here are a loss to understand why Oman should be putting up all the risk capital to study commercial exploitation of one of its own natural resources.

Planning experts have their doubts because Omani fishermen at present operate in a very primitive way and could be swamped by a massive trawler and canning industry on their doorstep.

"You've got to play a thing like this with kid gloves," one of them explained. "you can't just crash in here on multi-million-dollar feet."

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